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AN IDEAL FOR  
COLLEGE GIRLS

*A Life Sketch of*

MARTHA T. FISKE

*By*

FRANCES J. DYER

AMERICAN BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
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## Foreword

To one college student who is able to go out as a foreign missionary there are a hundred who must stay at home. This sketch of Miss Martha T. Fiske is written for the benefit of the hundred. She was "a detained volunteer," and the way she accepted that fact and used her talents and opportunities to advance the kingdom from her own home as a base have led us to present her story in this form. Miss Dyer has caught the central points in Miss Fiske's short life with rare skill and presented them in such a manner as to make her character stand out with distinct beauty and power. This life presents a new type of young womanhood—the product of the new movements among young people which have arisen in the last few years. Its value goes far beyond "student volunteers" and "detained volunteers." Its message is by no means limited to college girls. It is good reading for all young people. Here is a young lady of rare personal charm, social standing, and literary culture, in accord with modern educational and religious ideas, who deliberately chose the cultivation of interest in foreign missions among young people as the sphere of her life. Such a life is a sign of the new era in this work of world evangelization. As there is a new missionary abroad, so there is a new worker at home.

We want thousands of college students and especially college girls to read this sketch. It will help them decide how to invest their lives for the greatest good. Will you help us circulate this number of our little quarterly, and for the sake of your own work in behalf of this greatest of all causes will you not seek to learn the secret of Martha Fiske's devotion?

CORNELIUS H. PATTON

*Home Secretary of American Board*



*“ When my Heavenly  
Father calls me from  
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# AN IDEAL FOR COLLEGE GIRLS

## *A Life Sketch of Martha T. Fiske*

BY FRANCES J. DYER

IN the winter of 1907, two days before the Christmas chimes pealed forth their glad-some music, there passed from the beautiful city of Cambridge, Massachusetts,

“To where beyond these voices there is peace,”

a young woman of rare and strong personality. Her life was “exempt from public haunt,” but she was enshrined in the hearts of a large circle of friends and acquaintances, who always went out from her presence renewed in purpose and with a larger vision of the deep significance of life.

Martha Theresa Fiske was born in Brookline, Massachusetts, January 4, 1877. Not long afterwards her parents moved to Cambridge, and still occupy the same house where their only child lived and grew to womanhood. It was not my privilege to have a personal acquaintance with her, therefore my analysis of her character is free from that bias towards partiality which is love's prerogative. I never saw her but once, shortly after her graduation, but there was an inner illumination of the face which once seen could never be forgotten. The tall, slender, graceful figure, and the radiant, responsive face were easily distinguishable in an audience. In dress, in speech, in bearing, everything betokened the refinement and delicacy which go with gentle birth and constant association with cultivated minds. She might well have been the inspiration for this sonnet, written of another young girl who unconsciously uplifts those who meet her casually;

"As one who, walking in a barren field,  
Comes sudden on a bed of violets sweet,  
Or sees amid a tangled growth of brier  
A fair wild rose, upspringing at his feet,  
So do I feel when *her* I chance to meet;  
The air grows fragrant and the distant skies  
Come softly down with all their wealth of sun;  
For you have but to look into her eyes  
To see God's garden there—a glad surprise,  
That makes the day a happier one to live.  
So, blessings on the woman who can give  
The scent of violets and the sweets of rose  
To those who wander lonely, and suppose  
They walk in barren fields."<sup>1</sup>

Since Miss Fiske's death, December 23, 1907, I have listened to the tributes paid to her at a memorial service in Ford Building, Boston, held under the auspices of the Young People's Missionary Movement; have talked freely with her classmates and intimate friends; have sat with her parents under the shadow of their great grief in the attractive home of which Martha was the center; have lingered in the "study" where her literary work was done, and turned the leaves of her favorite books. Out of these contacts has grown such a conception of noble and symmetrical womanhood that I feel impelled to offer it to the world as an ideal for college girls. May others see the vision and "follow the gleam."

### Classic Cambridge

CAMBRIDGE furnishes a fitting background for the picture of such a life. Historically it is a favored city, one to which thousands of tourists flock every year to visit the classic shrines of old Harvard. Strangers cross continent and ocean to pass through the stately main gateway, bearing the dates 1636-1639. They gaze with reverence upon the few somber, almost monastic buildings which belong to the period of the Revolution. Miss Fiske's home was in the very midst of these historic and literary

<sup>1</sup> From "Lilacs in the Wood," by Lilla T. Elder.

associations. The tree which marks the spot where Washington took command of the army is within a few rods of her father's house. The famous "yard" of Harvard was familiar ground. She loved the shadows cast by the tall elms and the splashes of sunshine on the turf. Daily she passed the quaint old buildings on the campus, with their deeply recessed windows and tiny panes of glass, where some of America's most eminent men illustrated the principle of plain



*Old Gate at Harvard*

living and high thinking. As a girl she wandered through Memorial Hall, with its noble and impressive interior, its great dining hall paneled in oak, beautified by memorial stained glass windows, and filled with portraits and busts, all of historic and some of artistic interest. She had access to the college library, one of the most valuable in the country and rich in private collections. This scholastic atmosphere was just suited to nourish the mind of a thoughtful, studious child. She prepared for college at the Gilman School, one of the finest private schools for girls in the country, and was ready to matriculate at an early age, but on account of

delicate health she spent the years from thirteen to seventeen at home. This made her, in a very peculiar sense, the comrade of her parents, and the bond between them was singularly strong. At the age when girls naturally form enduring ties with other young women, she was entering more and more fully into fellowship with father and mother. They were always her most intimate companions. As one of them said: "Martha had no one who was exclusively her friend. She was inclusive in her friendships."

### Radcliffe Days

IN 1902 she was graduated from Radcliffe with the degree of A.B., and in 1904 received from her *alma mater* the degree of A.M. Though Radcliffe itself is modern, its history reaches back to 1643, when an Englishwoman of that name gave £100 to Harvard to establish its first scholarship. This college for women is a recognized part of the university. Its diplomas bear the seal of the older institution and the signature of its president. Its first home, Fay House, a dignified Colonial structure, was very near Martha's home and a place to which she was warmly attached. Having always had a taste for church history, and a desire to read the Bible in the original tongues, she studied Hebrew and also spent a year at the Harvard Divinity School. In 1899 she took a trip abroad with her parents, who found her knowledge of modern languages and her love of art in all its branches a great convenience in traveling. Interest in college did not end with graduation. She continued to grace its social functions with her presence, attended the games of basket ball, and often dropped in at morning prayers. So the rich, fruitful years in old Cambridge passed away laden with the best which this world has to offer.

## Church and Social Life

THESE years of study moved far more leisurely than with most students. There was no occasion for haste, no reason why a prescribed course should be completed at a given time. Her home was right there in Cambridge, where she could avail herself at any time of its libraries and its facilities for original research. She was not only a student, but a scholar, with



*Memorial Hall, Cambridge*

a scholar's qualities of thoroughness and exactitude. Yet devotion to study did not interfere with either social obligations or church duties. She joined the Shepard Memorial Church at the age of fourteen. The pastor, Dr. Alexander McKenzie, was an admirable spiritual guide to a girl of her temperament. She had a class of girls in Sunday school; was active in a mission, known as the Riverside Alliance; was leader of the Guild, an organization of young ladies;

and was connected with the foreign and home missionary societies for older women of the church. In these varied spheres of activity she worked with quiet zeal and efficiency. Into them all she carried a spirit of joyousness which was one of her most distinguishing traits. As one friend said, "Her entrance into a room was like a burst of sunshine." It was a marvel how she could accomplish so much and at the same time meet a multitude of social claims.

The outline of my picture thus far shows much that is lovely in character, but nothing that is exceptional. The counterpart may be found elsewhere in the ranks of college girls. Other daughters full of "gracious household ways" have made

"Sweet homes wherein to live and die."

Others gifted with social charm have added joy to human intercourse. Others with cultivated minds and consecrated spirit have rendered acceptable service in church and allied organizations. How, then, did Martha T. Fiske differ from multitudes of high-minded young women who are not satisfied to live an aimless, selfish life? Wherein did she transcend others? Why have I selected her as a type of the "ideal" college girl?

### The Secret of Her Influence

AN answer to these queries will take us into the sacred inner chamber of her soul, where will be found the secret of her influence. Those who stood in closest relation to her knew that in her lifetime this influence was pervasive and far-reaching. Since she went away it has been discovered that it is still a living force in most unexpected places. There is reason to believe that it will go on with increasing power

"Till the sun grows cold  
And the stars are old,

And the leaves of the Judgment Book unfold."

Dr. C. H. Parkhurst says: "Person is the prime impulse in all human ennoblement and in all historic advance. An idea, whatever its truthfulness, becomes dynamic only as it is first taken in and then lived forth by a mind that is earnest and a heart that is pure and warm." Another has remarked: "It is people that count. You want to put yourself into people; they touch other people; these, others still, and so you go on working forever."

Miss Fiske's initial step towards incarnating herself in others was to turn towards the Invisible and dwell in the secret place of the Most High till transformed into the same image. Here she learned the mind of Christ as to what he really meant by the phrase, "the kingdom of God." Then she came forth from that glorious Presence to interpret its meaning in her own life and to enter influentially into the lives of others. After her death these words were found penciled on the fly-leaf of her Bible, and furnish the key to unlock the soul's sanctuary. We enter with reverent feet and read:

*"When my Heavenly Father calls me from this world to higher service there is just one word that I should like to have remembered in connection with my name, and that is 'missions' — the cause for which my Saviour lived and died."*

Here, then, is the centripetal idea that controlled and directed the exercise of all her powers. Had she chosen, she could have devoted herself to literary pursuits and doubtless won distinction as an author. Had she elected to be a teacher she could easily have become famous. Had leadership in social or philanthropic enterprises been her chief ambition, brilliant success awaited her. And what a chance she had to live a life of elegant leisure! Many, circumstanced as she was, would have



*Radcliffe College*

spent their time in foreign travel, in self-culture through music, art, literature, and refined pleasures of every sort. With her these forms of personal enrichment were made tributary to "the cause" which was paramount in her thought to everything else, because it was the one for which her Master gave his life. Having seen the "vision splendid," it became her absorbing passion to lead others to the place where they, too, would see and believe.

### Leadership in College

**I**N order to study the process by which this idea became dynamic, let us go back to college days. When she entered Radcliffe the life of its Young Woman's Christian Association was at low ebb, and it had no particular place for holding meetings. At her own expense she hired a room for this purpose and began quietly to bring girl after girl into personal relations with Jesus Christ. This she regarded as fundamental. One method of reaching the students was through classes for Bible study. For this work she made careful preparation. Although familiar with the text in the original languages, and with the best interpretations by modern scholars, there was nothing pedantic in her teaching. Choice illustrations from a wide range of reading, fresh incidents and apt quotations, were skillfully used to elucidate the subject. She knew how to ask stimulating questions in a way to make pupils do their own thinking. But the exercise was something more than an intellectual pleasure and stimulus. Members of the class were brought face to face with the duty to become "doers of the word and not hearers only."

A freshman at Radcliffe when Miss Fiske was a senior, and president of the Y. W. C. A., was impressed by her insight into character. Standing one day and watching a group of

freshmen on the campus she said to this young woman: "Have you got hold of those girls? They are the key to the class." This proved to be the case, and her wisdom was justified in selecting one of their own number to make the initial approach. The incident also illustrates her ability to make others undertake what seemed to them an impossible task. How often she said, "I can't, but you can," when in reality her own penetrating personality was the secret spring of the other's action. This was one way she had of "putting herself into people." More



*Fay House, Radcliffe College*

than one Radcliffe graduate stands today in some place of responsibility in Christian service as an exponent of Miss Fiske's power thus to incarnate herself in others.

One of her college mates gives a glimpse of her many-sidedness in this appreciative tribute: "Her clear judgment, tact, and confident faith did more than anything else to establish the Christian Association as a recognized power in Radcliffe College. Those who came to know her in the Cabinet of the Christian Association and in the Bible study classes felt the inspira-

tion of her earnestness and learned the secret of her peaceful life in her constant prayer. Her gentle dignity and sweet womanliness made her beloved among many groups of the girls at college, who showed their love and appreciation by choosing her president of the Science Club, of the History Club, and of the Graduate Club. . . . Martha Fiske was one of the rare women whose personality so expressed in all times and places her own Christian faith that one always felt compelled to be one's best in her company. Her generosity and thoughtfulness for others were so quietly practiced that many failed to know to what an extent she was giving herself for others. But none who came to know her could fail to be impressed by the sweetness and earnestness of her life. Her sweetness was but the natural expression of this quiet but firm Christian faith made practical in loving service."

At a memorial service of the Advisory Board of the College Y. W. C. A., of which Miss Fiske was a member, held January 16, several speakers emphasized the prayer side of her life. To many this was her most characteristic quality. Girls who came under her influence unconsciously formed the habit of saying to themselves, whenever perplexed or discouraged, "Martha would pray, and I will, too." She was the first person to enroll herself as a member of the American Board Prayer Union, and to pledge loyalty to its threefold purpose:

(1) To pray daily for our missions and missionaries, and for those who administer the affairs of the Board at home, and to do all in my power to promote united prayer for foreign missions in my church;

(2) To keep myself informed concerning the work and needs of the Board at home and abroad, in order that my prayer may be intelligent and prevailing;

(3) To live as one devoted to the extension of Christ's kingdom, and hence to couple with my prayers gifts of my means as the Lord prospers me.

Another spoke of what it meant when a freshman to have such a senior adviser for a friend. Others mentioned her self-effacement. She had a happy faculty of consulting with the girls on big matters, making them feel that the work was theirs, but never obtruding her own affairs. Repose was another marked characteristic, one in refreshing contrast to the bustling nervousness of the age. "Martha never seemed in a hurry, and she was always ready to listen," was the significant comment of a young friend. This power of ministry to the deepest needs of others was purchased, as is usually the case, with the price of pain. Though joy was its dominant note, her life was not without the hidden discipline necessary for the fullest development of a human soul. A fine, impalpable reserve was interpreted by some as coldness. Perfect poise was mistaken for insensibility. Only those who were closest to her knew how deeply she drank of life's most sacred experiences. For her, as for all who walk in the footsteps of the Son of Man, there was a *via dolorosa*, even though it was hidden with flowers.



*Auditorium at Silver Bay*

*By Courtesy of the American Baptist Missionary Union*



*Silver Bay*

### Summers at Silver Bay

IT was her strong desire to engage in actual service as a foreign missionary, but delicate health and other obstacles interposed. "Have you the will? Leave God the way," said the gentle Pompilia. The way, in Miss Fiske's case, was principally by teaching mission study classes, beginning with the young people in the churches of Cambridge and Boston. The rise of what is called the Young People's Missionary Movement opened a still wider channel of influence. This was organized at Silver Bay, New York, in July, 1902, and from the outset she was one of the most potent forces in making it a success. Her breadth of view, clear judgment, and tact, added to unusual personal charm, were invaluable at the early stage of the undertaking. The Student Volunteer Movement, to which she had committed herself in college days, had already become a mighty factor in the world's evangelization. For a whole generation, in nearly a thousand educational institutions, it had brought young men and women face to face with their personal responsibility to the millions who know nothing of Christ and his salvation. The time was now ripe for a fresh concentration of effort among youth who, for various reasons, must stay at home, so this new movement came into being. The spot chosen for its inauguration is one of the loveliest in the land. Silver Bay

is at the northern end of Lake George, a beautiful waterway

"Sown with islands out of dreamland,  
Girt by green and solemn mountains,"

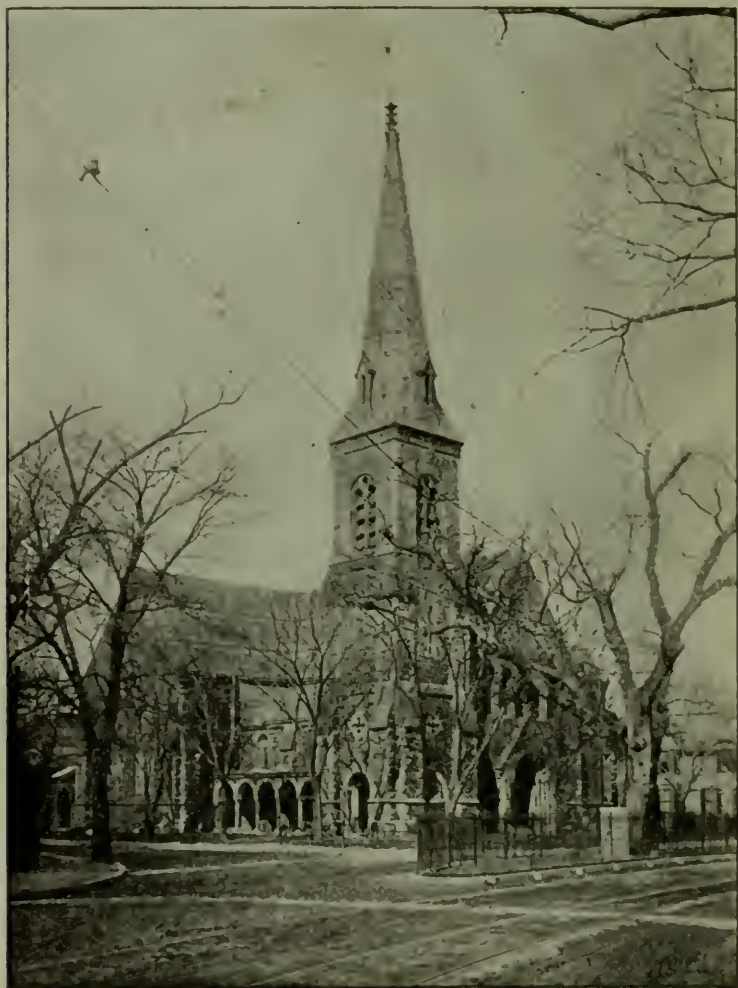
for all around the horizon the Adirondacks rear their hoary heads. The region is rich in historical interest as well as in natural beauty. The property of several hundred acres is owned and controlled by the Silver Bay Association and devoted entirely to Christian purposes. Here on the cool heights of the everlasting hills, with the blue waters of the lake rippling below, church workers and students flocked by the hundreds each summer to be quickened in their spiritual life, and to receive more definite instruction concerning the victories of the conquering Christ throughout the world. This offered a rare opportunity to Miss Fiske, and for five successive years she taught mission study classes at the conferences. A precious memory to those who met her there is the recollection of the graceful figure and earnest face outlined against the green hills or sunset sky, leading her youthful listeners, rapt and eager, to higher and higher levels of knowledge and aspiration. One young woman said that she gained more from the experiences at Silver Bay than from her entire course at college.

### Use of Talents

IN the summer of 1906, after teaching at Silver Bay, Miss Fiske crossed the continent to conduct similar classes on the Pacific coast. With her instinctive discernment she foresaw what a powerful influence this Young People's Missionary Movement is destined to become in advancing "the cause for which my Saviour lived and died." Therefore she poured into it her time, strength, money, and wealth of scholarship, for she realized that broad foundations of

knowledge should underlie youthful enthusiasm in order to achieve the best results. She wrote but one book, but she put *herself* into the lives of hundreds, possibly thousands, of young men and women of her own generation. She communicated to them her own spiritual ideals and her passion for realizing them through propagation of the missionary idea. In her book, "The Word and the World," is revealed how thoroughly she was committed to sane yet modern interpretations of Scripture. The assertion often made that religious fervor is seldom allied with modern scholarship is amply refuted in her case. Her range of reading was remarkably wide. The latest volume she read was "The Higher Ministries of Recent English Poetry." Her own book, published by the Student Volunteer Movement, is a series of outline studies to show the missionary character and value of the Bible, and bears evidence on every page of accuracy and thoroughness. These same qualities appear in the numerous outlines of study and programs for meetings which she prepared. They are models of conscientious and scholarly work, and indicate how keenly she felt that missionary literature for young people, even in leaflet form, should be the best of its kind. It was at her earnest solicitation that one of her classmates, Miss Alice Newell, who went as a missionary to India, is supported by the Radcliffe College Y. W. C. A. It was through her, too, that Dr. W. T. Grenfell visited the college, and she was always deeply interested in his mission in Labrador. She could say with Wesley, "The world is my parish," for her prayers and benefactions reached around the globe. A touching letter was received after her death from a young colored woman in the South whom she had helped, a graduate of Hampton Institute. From other far-off places came similar testimonials. One of the most beautiful tributes to her memory is a reading room in the American Board church in Foochow, China. Friends in the

Shepard Church, Cambridge, expressed their love for Miss Fiske by providing this room, and sent a portrait of her to hang on the wall. What an eloquent, though silent, message that face will carry to those Chinese Christians!



*Shepard Memorial Church*

*By Courtesy of J. F. Olsson & Co., Cambridge, Mass.*

### **The Call Home**

**I**N summing up the earthly life of our Lord Dr. John Young says: "He had no time to construct and to organize—his life was too short—and almost all he did was to *speak*. He spoke in familiar conversation with his friends,

or at the wayside to passers-by, or to those who chose to consult him, or to large assemblies, as opportunity offered. He left behind him a few spoken truths—not a line or word of writing—and a certain spirit incarnated in his principles and breathed out from his life; and then he died.” Looking back over the centuries we realize that his life still continues with transcendent and immortal power because of the sacrificial character of his life and death. The principle holds true of the humblest of his followers. The measure of Martha Fiske’s earthly career was thirty short, beautiful years, but her life is just begun. “Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abideth by itself alone; but if it die, it beareth much fruit.”

On the trip across the continent she expended a good deal of vitality in studying missions along the way, and on her return showed signs of fatigue which culminated in a long illness, lasting from March till the following December. Yet no one dreamed that it was at all serious in character, for most of the time she was busy reading and studying, happy among books and friends, still interested in church and college and world affairs. There was no change in the radiance of the face, the music of the merry laugh, or the wonderfully joyous spirit. So the weeks slipped away in the dearest spot of all the world to her, the Cambridge home, with the beloved parents, till suddenly one noon she heard the summons, “The Master is come and calleth for thee.” When Christmas dawned, two days later, she was with him whom not having seen she had loved and served from early childhood.

Tennyson tells us that “we needs must love the highest when we see it,” yet it is possible to turn from the sight and make what Dante calls “the great refusal.” What will you do, O student host, with the ideal which this life

holds up to your view? God calls to you as truly as to Martha Fiske, Irene Petrie, Mary Morrill, and others of their spirit, to make "missions," interpreted in its broadest sense, your supreme choice. He calls for *your* youthful enthusiasm, *your* scholarship, *your* social advantages, *your* gifts, graces, accomplishments, opportunities of every kind. And he offers you the joy of finding that they count for the most when used in his service.

May he help you to heed the call, to see the glorious openings for work in this new century, and to search your hearts for what you really mean when you offer the petition, "Thy kingdom come."

"So here I give  
The gospel of her precious, Christian life."

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